

Life Groups – For Leaders and Potential Leaders

Part 7: Leading a Life Group Meeting

The audio version of this teaching can be downloaded from <http://cornerstonechurch.co.za/life-groups-leading-a-life-group-meeting/>

In Part 6 we covered the way in which newcomers are brought into the life of Cornerstone and what believers in the church expect from the leaders. We also covered some practicalities in leading a Life Group and these will be expounded on in greater detail for this final part of this series.

What Life Groups leaders do at Life Group

1. Facilitate worship and prayer

We do this in whichever way we know how. While we might not have a musician in our Life Group but we can still sing songs and engage in prayer. Some churches in Africa only sing with one drum! Most of us do have CD players and so on. Even just bowing our heads and singing songs is good.

Of course, worship is not just singing - it's also praying and there are many kinds of prayers. See this scripture below.

1 Tim 2: 1 – 8

2 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. 7 For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

8 I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling;

Paul is teaching Timothy on how to lead his local church and how to teach this to pastors. We pray by lifting holy hands without anger or quarrelling.

We also pray for the nations. In Mark 1:17 Jesus says that His house is a house of prayer for all nations. So all nations can pray and we pray for the nations.

Also in worship we stir up the gifts (see below), break bread, discuss the word and have a ministry time. While we advocate “dining room Christianity” that doesn't mean there is no agenda at all. No, we do have a spiritual agenda for the time.

2) Cultivate contribution

1 Cor 14:26.

26 What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up

It's important that we do this. It's our job as leaders. We must understand that all ministry in the local church works towards the functioning and maturing of the priesthood so that we can all come into the fullness of Christ.

People don't come to your Life Group to see the gift on your life. No, they come to express what God is doing in our togetherness. It's not possible to do this in a large congregational meeting – not everyone is able to contribute, it wouldn't be practical. But in a Life Group each person has a gift, anointing and ministry they can use. In a local church, each person is valuable.

Secondly, it's no good if you do it all (but you should be able to step into any gap). A good Life Group leader creates opportunity for involvement and contribution and builds away from themselves, looking to delegate. There are a myriad of ways in which this can be done – asking guys to host the next meeting, cater for the next term, lead the group in prayer, lead the discussions based on Sunday's preach, etc. Doing all this also helps to break spectatorship, which is a goal for us as leaders.

3) Teaching an application of truth

Teaching the Word is part of our worship, it's not a separate thing. We celebrate the Word and hold it and its authority as a high value. At Life Group it's good that we read it and discuss it. Honesty and vulnerability should be cultivated.

When it comes to discussion we stay away from meaningless debates and conversation, like a six week debate on what the animals ate on the ark or other such things that sidetrack us! There are as many theories as people but the reason why we look at the Word of God is to become more like Jesus, not to discuss some new irrelevant theory.

A Life Group leader creates an atmosphere of learning, discovering and the obedient application of truth. People must leave with handles on how they can live the Word, not information on our latest opinions. We steer people towards the Scriptures and Jesus, not towards us. We want to help them to refine their ability to consult Scripture for themselves.

With this it's important to remember that Life Groups are not mini-Sunday morning meetings. So there's no pressure to preach a message or re-preach Sunday. Rather, discuss Sunday's message, ask questions based around it, and look to bring things into practical application, asking people what action they're going to take in response to the message, and so on.

As per Acts 6, the function of a deacon is to come alongside the elders, who are the governmental authority in a local church that decide on doctrine and direction. That's why at Life Group the deacons reinforce what's been taught on a Sunday. That also means we're all going in the same direction and everyone can get on board with the same vision.

Church is not Twitter where there are a million different opinions all vying for a platform to express their vision and doctrine. No, we are one church going in one direction.

That doesn't mean deacons can't run a series or do something of their own. Sometimes it may be necessary to teach people life skills – such as finances, or marriage, and so on.

That's very good. We do have the material which is available for use, and we also do run courses like that on Wednesdays. In these cases, deacons should discuss it with their elder before going ahead.

The elders aren't looking to stop deacons from sharing their revelation. But the Life Groups have been designed for shepherding the folk, integrating them and letting them function in the life of this church.

Lastly, the Sunday messages at Bedfordview are recorded and made downloadable so that the deacons can get them, make notes, and so on. It's good to encourage those in the Life Group to do the same.

4) We facilitate relationships.

A mature Christian can handle relationships properly, so as leaders we teach others to have relational responsibility. Most of the church's counselling takes place at the Life Group. We are peacemakers and so maintain relational openness in the group.

In Part 5 we covered the three stages of relational maturity – *friendship*, *relationship* and *partnership*. We can't get to the partnerships we're called to without friendship and relationship. In Life Groups we work out these covenants and find a way to make things work. Then we've moved into partnership.

Many of us never get to be fully functioning in our callings and ministries because we never learn how to handle our relationships. For leaders, most of the work actually takes place in teaching people how to love one another. Our King has decreed that we will be one through His blood, so it is possible.

Think about the early church, how 120 people prayed for 40 consecutive days together in the upper room (Acts 1, 2). That's unity.

God is calling us to adventures together in partnership. But we won't get there if we continue to criticise and remain unforgiving. We must take this seriously and live healed.

Doing so develops community and even greater hospitality as more people open their homes.

Practicalities in leading a Life Group at home and administration

- Start on time and finish at a reasonable time. Studies show that after one and a half hours people have dialed out. We need to honour people and stick to one and a half hours as a maximum. If people want to stay for longer then that's up to them, but close it off formally after one and a half hours.
- Be hospitable. Create a warm atmosphere. Make sure there are refreshments. If it's not your home then try and get some community around things like catering and cleaning. If it is your home, remember that we are running a home group not a hotel group! Keep the house clean and so forth but also keep it "homey".
- Look for ways to impact and serve the community. Go to the hospital together to pray for people; a senior citizens home; and so forth. Think of ways in which the group can get involved in social justice issues or just serve those in need in the

area.

- Keep your home open and let it be a safe environment. People should know they can come to this house and talk about anything.
- Plan a term in advance. Don't let things happen haphazardly. Let everyone know when they're serving at a Sunday meeting and so forth.
- Make sure the 'big rocks' (the important events) are on the calendar. These events are values to us as a church (like the EQUIP time). You should know when these are and should be encouraging guys to attend these, in addition to coming yourself.
- Stay informed with what's going on at the church and where the church is going.
- Put the leaders' meetings in your diary.
- Plan for the apostolic. Think of how your group can do apostolic things together – visiting a site, spending an evening with another life group, praying for a church plant, going on trips together. Sometimes you might all want to save up to send one person on a trip. If you pray for church plants or trips and get prophetic words, let those in the leadership have these so that the necessary people can be encouraged. Remember, the apostolic belongs to every believer.
- Find out from your elder when they are visiting this term.
- Plan your communication with your elder.
- Keep the church database up to date with your details and your group's details. Phone the office for this. If someone changes their address or phone number, let the office know.
- Get onto our communication channels so you can stay informed. Our website www.cornerstonechurch.co.za lists all the events. We also have a Facebook page and a Twitter feed and a mailing list, which you can sign up for on the website.

Multiplying and planting

The idea is that groups will grow and then multiply, meaning another group is planted from the original group. We don't believe we will (or should) see this every time but we do know that we need double the amount of groups we have now to do all the things God has called us to do as a church.

As Life Group leaders, thinking about where a new group may be needed should be something you pray into. Amongst all the other gifts we're raising up in the church, work with the elders in helping them recognise and raise up new leaders. Even raise up those with personalities that clash with yours.

Remember, we always build away from ourselves and it's a sign of a good leader when they can bring through someone who has a bigger capacity than they do. In fact, developing stronger leaders than you are is part of the goal!

We don't multiply groups using any formula (when the group reaches 20, we multiply etc.). In some contexts across the world that's worked but it's never worked at Cornerstone. Some leaders can have 100 people coming to their home – it's happened before!

Working as a team with the elders

Remember, deacons are part of the leadership team of the church. The elders deal with doctrinal and disciplinary issues. So work with them – if someone has difficult questions, bring those to the elders.

Constantly we are endeavouring to close this gap between elders and deacons. It's one team with different functions. We function in partnership.

Have regular meetings with your elder who oversees your group. Make sure you're able to be challenged and look to receive correction so you can be a better leader and grow more into Christ.

Concluding thoughts

- Deacons must be able to lead themselves. This means they should dig their own wells (places of refreshment), manage their resources, and manage their devotion times with the Lord.
- Your devotion time is your best preparation for your Life Group. If you have a strong devotional life, you can lead from the heart and from the revelation God gives you of where we're going. You don't need to spend nights in research, just spend time in devotion to the Lord.
- Manage your time and your energy levels! Let the elders know what's happening. Don't run at more than full-speed and then burn out. Too many leaders burn out and then never get back into leading again. Rather, pace yourself. If you do step off for a season, have a plan to come back, otherwise you may miss the inheritance God has for you in leadership.
- Stir up the gifts God has given you. God gives the gift but it's up to us to work the gift. Doing this is important for the life of the local church.

Questions

1. How do you lead a life group gathering?
2. What should you teach?
3. What is the expected outcome of a Life Group gathering?
4. What do we do at a Life Group?